

Protecting the bounty of the early summer harvest: Part one

Early summer is one of the most exciting times of the year in the garden! All that hard work is beginning to pay off: The peas are a sweet delight, the lettuce crisp and succulent. The radishes in succession plantings keep coming up to kiss our palettes with their pungent bite. The garlic planted last fall has most likely sent up scapes which are ready to be clipped, trimmed, and enjoyed in stir fries. And, if we are blessed enough to have a fruit patch in our garden, there are mouthwatering raspberries, luscious strawberries, and plump cherries ripe for the picking.

That is, of course, if the weeds, bugs, blights, and birds didn't get to our garden treasures before we did! These rascals of all sorts are enough to turn our dream garden into a disappointment. It is so easy to have high hopes and noble ambitions early on in the season, only to have these squashed like a squash bug feasting on our squash patch. So what are some logical steps we could take to fend off the competition?

Keep weeds under control. This is, admittedly, my greatest weakness - I thoroughly detest

weeding! The good news is that I love to use the cultivator and I like to mulch. It is much easier to keep weeds at bay by getting rid of them early in the season, and definitely before they set seed. But bare ground devoid of vegetation is a major cause of erosion and nutrient loss. So, if possible, keep thick mulch or a cover crop in vulnerable areas. These have an added benefit in that they add organic matter to the soil while suppressing weeds and preventing soil compaction. Some folks simply let the grass grow in walking rows and then mow or string-trim these

rows low. This method is partially effective, as creeping weeds have a way of winding their root systems into parts of the garden where they are not welcome. The best ways to get rid of weeds attack the entire weed. Banish bugs from the beginning. As with weeds, bugs may start small and unnoticed and then burst into a population explosion, delighting themselves with a feast of seedlings they did not sow, and fruit they did not grow. Mother Nature in her wisdom these pests oftentimes are a tasty meal for beneficial insects and microbes. It is vital that we keep this balance in our gardens. Realizing that we need a food source to feed the beneficials - whether it is

the host pest, or other foods - will help. We can assist these beneficials by planting umbrella-like flowers, avoiding broad-spectrum insecticides, and keeping carefully selected un-mown or high-mown areas as habitat. Hand picking of pests and their eggs is an eco-friendly solution, with gloves for the fainthearted. Knock or shake big bugs like Japanese beetles into a pail of soapy water. If it is absolutely necessary to spray, please use the least toxic and most natural substances possible. Diatomaceous earth, Hot Pepper Wax, wood ashes, neem oil, and garlic oil all come to mind as safer products worth investigating. MOFGA's pest report is a good place to start for information about garden pests and diseases reported locally and effective solutions. See the link online: www.mofga.org/Publications/PestReports/PestReports2010/tabid/1610/Default.aspx. One book that is highly recommended is Rodale's *The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control*.



by Emily Cates



GARDEN WORKS

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Favorite camping story

The first camping trip that lasted a lifetime

by Marcia J. Rogers and family

I remember our first time out camping in the early '90s. My husband, my two girls, ages five and 11, and myself. We went to Camden State Park. We got a tent site right across from the bathrooms. My husband and I slept in one tent, the girls in another.

We brought our blankets and pillows from home. We had household pots and pans, along with dishes and silverware. We forgot the can opener and a small cooler for the food. We forgot a lot of things we needed, but managed to do without. There was no pool. We took the car up to Mt. Battie to show the girls the castle or fort, and the beautiful sight. We walked around the campground everyday. Threw the ball around before it got dark. We sat around the fire and talked about our day, and even what we wanted to do the next day.

Went fishing on the dock at Lincolnville Beach, only 20 minutes from the campground. We even walked the breakwater out to the lighthouse in Rockland. Only a half-hour to Rockland. Did sight-seeing while we were out. At the end of the camping trip, the girls expressed how much they loved camping and wanted to do it again real soon. It brought us closer together as a family.

We slowly started buying camping supplies. Even the girls bought stuff with their allowance. Our kids still camp today when they can. We still camp every summer although we are no longer in a tent. More luxuries and less roughing it. But it brings us such joy to sit around the campfire and remember the days with the kids and how it was. It's a quiet and peaceful place. A beautiful way to relax and get rid of stress. Not many bugs, spray for them and nothing to worry about.

We are big fans of camping.

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